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"New Books in German Media and Communication Studies"

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Martin GRIMM

New Books in German Media and Communication Studies

In this book review article, I review a selection of recent work in German-language media and communication studies, a well-established and highly productive field little known on the landscape of English-language scholarship (for a brief outline of media and communication studies in Germany, see Reinhold Viehoff's "Introduction to *Media and Communication Studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg*" to the present issue of CLCWeb at <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/1>>). The following books are reviewed: Wolfgang Bock, *Bild-Schrift-Cyberspace. Grundkurs Medienwissen* (Bielefeld: [Aisthesis](#), 2002), Ulrich Schmitz and Horst Wenzel, eds., *Wissen und neue Medien. Bilder und Zeichen von 800 bis 2000* (Berlin: [Erich Schmidt](#), 2003), Johannes Bittner, *Digitalität, Sprache, Kommunikation. Eine Untersuchung zur Medialität von digitalen Kommunikationsformen und Textsorten und deren varietätenlinguistische Modellierung* (Berlin: [Erich Schmidt](#), 2003), Carsten Winter, Tanja Thomas, and Andreas Hepp, eds., *Medienidentitäten. Identität und Kontext von Globalisierung und Medienkultur* (Köln: [Herbert von Halem](#), 2003), and Udo Göttlich, Clemens Albrecht, and Winfried Gebhardt, eds., *Populäre Kultur als repräsentative Kultur. Die Herausforderung der Cultural Studies* (Köln: [Herbert von Halem](#), 2002). Admittedly, my selection is haphazard and certainly not representative of the large amount of work published in the field (see, e.g., my "Selected Bibliography of German-language Books in Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies (2000-2005)" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol7/iss4/12>> however, I hope the review allows, at the very least, a limited insight into current discussions about theory, method, and subject matter in German-language media and communication studies.

I begin with Wolfgang Bock's *Bild-Schrift-Cyberspace. Grundkurs Medienwissen*: Wolfgang Bock is co-editor, with Sven Kramer und Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, of the journal *Zeitschrift für Kritische Theorie* and the author of a book on Walter Benjamin. His work is highly theoretical and written in the best tradition of academic German which means that his text is not easily accessible even for a scholar in the humanities but who works in another field than media studies. Overall, in my opinion, he does not achieve his own pronounced task, namely to offer a basic textbook on current debates. The book is conceived as the first of a three-part-series by the author about the "prehistory" of media. His goal is to bring back into memory that "the most recent and the very oldest media are connected" and that thus in contemporary media "image, writing, and numerical representations were thus recombined accordingly" (11; all subsequent translations from the German are mine). The book is intended to explore the relationship between image and script, picture and writing, in relation to the debate about media at the beginning of the twenty-first century. At the same time, Bock wants to evade the (subconscious) theological and secular hopes in existence today, which he perceives to have infiltrated much scholarship in the philosophy of new media. In the introduction he summarizes briefly his approach, based on the two essential poles of media studies that emerged in the second part of the twentieth century: The technical-cybernetical approach of Shannon and Weaver (wherein the content of communication is independent from the medium of communication) and the semiotic notion according to McLuhan (wherein the medium is the message). Bock claims that the concept of medium would be much older and that a second meaning of the concept would be where in traditional cultures people said to have paranormal abilities were also called a "medium." Thus, "the concept also owns a spiritual resonance. ... And within spiritualism, following secular modernity, the photographic picture is connected to an ambiguous interrelation. Even after the fall of the great religions, the media retain rests of a distorted theological meaning, one that transfers itself now onto new media technology" (16). In the following pages, Bock explores the media history of the image: Beginning with a discussion of Greek-Roman antiquity, he focuses on the history of the image in Christianity, in particular with regard to the iconoclastic objection to images in the history of the Greek Orthodox Church. He then continues to discuss presentational traditions of the Renaissance and, followed by a leap directly into the nineteenth century to the event of photography, where he ends his

discussion. In his first chapter, Bock devotes much discussion to the illusion of evidence within images and to the often-missing public reflection about them. He carries this thought to the second chapter to point to the utopias which are inherent in modern media. He criticizes McLuhan and asks whether there is the possibility of real progress with modern media. As an example to illustrate his point, he writes in his third chapter about the caves of Lascaux and its reproduction for tourists, and he comes to the conclusion that with having the copy in place, now the art of copying is admired more than the original. Consequently, Bock argues, modern technology would again become the objective of romantic projections. In the second part of his book, Bock examines the "heathen and theological prehistory of old and new media" (89). Here, he emphasizes the semiotic connections between images and texts, for their possibilities of description as signs "which point above themselves and have a meaning" (89). This is followed by a portrayal and discussion of the (lowly) appraisal of images by philosophers in antiquity such as Plato or Aristotle, the Roman image-friendly tradition which then proceeds to early Christianity. But later -- and this aspect is covered extensively -- this is questioned with regard to the Constantinopolitan Eastern Christian Church, where the theological dispute with regard to the worship of icons resulted in iconoclasms. In the fifth and sixth chapters, the Renaissance is scrutinized where the re-discovery of Egyptian emblems find predecessors for an own tradition of allegoric emblems. The special quality of these emblems is, for Bock, that they are meant to represent more than just the displayed and thus "important is, again, the new relation between image and script" (167). Here, Bock sees the creative forerunners of photography. His fascination with these emblems lies in their non-naturalistic nature (as in opposite to photography), so that they are to be recognized as artificial and that their allegoric meaning has always to be decoded by the viewer.

The third part of the book is devoted extensively to the early period of new media beginning with the invention of photography. Pioneers of early photography such as Niépce, Daguerre, Disdéri, etc., are portrayed in detail, followed by a comparison between photography as technique and its industrial context (interestingly, Bock employs in his discussion the notion of *Kulturindustrie* [culture industry] termed by Adorno and Horkheimer although his point of reference is the early nineteenth century) and the subjective art of painting (as in portraits). What is interesting to me is Bock's argument for the fast spread of photography, which he explains among others with the vanity and ambitions of the bourgeoisie. An important factor in this is for him the contrast between the supposed realism of photographic images and what they are "really" showing. Thus, Bock introduces the theory of photography of Roland Barthes, who strongly emphasizes the difference between the pictorial depiction of an image and its elucidation. In his last chapter Bock returns to a discussion of the function of photography as memory. The elementary question for Bock in this regard is whether remembrance only uses photographs or whether memory is constructed by them, since the pictorial depiction could confuse other perceptions. While Bock offers interesting ideas in his book, what is lacking is a synthesis or conclusion of his discussion and propositions.

Ulrich Schmitz and Horst Wenzel's *Wissen und neue Medien. Bilder und Zeichen von 800 bis 2000* is an anthology of papers from an interdisciplinary conference in 2000 at the University of Essen. The goal of the editors is not only the presentation of papers on current transformations in media, but also the reconstruction of its prehistory in order to "question the coherences between script, image, and the numeric in old and new media" (8). As the editors write in their introduction, the current time is a time of transition into an iconic age, the "iconic turn," which challenges tradition and establishes new forms of communication where the boundaries between disciplines such as literary history, art history, linguistics, computer science, medieval studies, etc., become porous and dismantled as questions and possibilities about the concept of image for a language in new media and the therein employed signs for text and hypertext for the technical layout and its strategies of visualization are no longer isolated but become an integral part of both form and content. In consequence, the papers in the volume, while dealing with media in a historical context, discuss the matter at hand with regard to early parallels and the implied potentials offered by new media and their technologies. For instance, Ulrich Ernst discusses the poetry of Hrabanus Maurus as a multimedial work of art where interdisciplinary allows for a new

understanding of medieval literature in the context of book culture. Ernst discusses, for instance, Maurus's poem cycle "liber de laudibus sanctae crucis" as an example where words, images, and figurative numeric symbolism are connected. According to Ernst, with these poems intermediality and non-linearity are applied as principles of creating art and he concludes his paper suggesting that "by cross-linking linguistic, pictorial, and numeric codes the work of Hrabanus Maurus could almost claim a status of singularity within medieval literature: Determined in control-by-numbers, de-linearization, and transversality, it precedes modern hypertext by using additional integrated icons and synestatisation and thus predates forms of hypermedia" (37). Haiko Wandhoff with his discussion of Chrétien de Troyes's medieval text draws parallels between our current media society and the structure of the medieval communication and he explores the example of the current fusion of images, script, and voice into multi-sensoric interfaces which, in turn, he considers an analogue to medieval handwritings. His thesis, explicated with Chrétien de Troyes's medieval text is that there is a link between these medieval strategies of virtualization/visualization and our contemporary computer-animated worlds of virtual reality. Norbert H. Ott argues in his paper that with the interconnection of images, text, and numbers already in the middle ages a model of the distribution of thought and knowledge existed where possibilities for multi-dimensional linkages and non-linear structures were offered. He shows with examples of illustrated manuscripts and incunabula that in medieval times images, texts, and numbers were understood as complementary codes of symbolic signs alike. When later in history text gained superiority for interpretation alone, this system was lost and it is in the electronic media culture when it is newly "rediscovered." Christina Lechtermann illustrates in her paper the example of the Alîse scene in Wolfram of Eschenbachs "Willehalm" the poetic and rhetoric strategies of this medieval artist, who, by this special form of describing the female character Alîse via the character Willehalm "whose view of desire for the body and whose emotional disposition is presented to the reader for acceptance" (111). Thus, Lechtermann portrays medieval concepts of thought about the human perception via the eyes.

Horst Wenzel examines in his paper gestures of the hand and fingers within communication along changes of media in the middle ages where he interprets the relations of text, image, and the numerical with the importance accorded to positions of e.g., the index finger or the middle finger, etc. He argues that such visual representations in early leaflets of the Gutenberg era can be understood as a prehistory of the experimental interface layout in digital media. Jürgen Fröhlich asks what the medieval media can tell us about our current media and he explicates this by presenting a brief cultural history of the number 0. Among his findings is the negative symbolic of 0 unto our times and he cites the example of the Y2K hysteria on the turn of the century. In their co-authored paper Angelika Storrer and Eva Lia Wyss reconstruct the historical development of the arrow symbol, beginning with cave painting and ending by navigation symbols in web browsers and websites. They show how new meanings and functions are based on older ones and that these symbols have finally gained such a complexity and flexibility that for their correct interpretation contextual, cultural, and media-related knowledge is required. Hermann Cölfen presents a media critical paper and shows the historical transition of forms of presentation in talkshows within German television history. He suggests that this transition can be seen as in a shift from dialogue-oriented talks on public channels to multi-modal entertainment spectacles of privately-owned television stations: They are characterized by increasing optical and acoustical ingredients, faster changes of speakers, commercials, and a large quantity of indistinguishable talkshow formats which puts effects into the foreground instead of content. Werner Holly analyses a forty-minute long retrospect on the preceding century that was broadcast on New Year's Eve 1999 on German public television. He begins by describing the structure of the show and lists the selected historical events and argues that that the editors used, obviously, for this purpose stereotypical and already broadcast clips such as Kennedy, Monroe, Hitler's speech at the outbreak of the Second World War, the landing of Apollo 11, etc. Holly suggests that the selected visuals represent media-transmitted clichés with "qualities" of stereotype but which differ from the classical linguistic meaning of stereotypes. Holly continues with a detailed scrutiny of some of the examples by means of four types of media historical clichés: Original-sound clichés, film-clip clichés, music clichés, and

speaker-text clichés. For example, Holly argues that the repeated visual and sound presentations of the Nazis results in a reinforcement of the myth of the "seduced" and thus responsible only in a mitigated fashion, thus in a way exonerating the German people's responsibilities with regard to the atrocities of the era. Holly concludes, that by using such multi-modal clichés a pompous pathos emerges, whose "automatization" by too many repetitions would trivialize the most horrific events in history. Ulrich Schmitz adds with his article another problem to the discussion around establishing a field of image studies, namely that of visually active text-image combinations. As Schmitz understands them, they cannot be described with current methods adequately: He begins with describing the nearly text- and image-free everyday life in the middle ages contrasted with our advertisement-laden streets and urban environment. The historical distinction between text and image -- with its prevalent logo-centric prejudice -- is going to become obsolete, he argues, as computerization eases their common production. Added to this is the process of ever-more demanding needs of/for information, which will exceed, eventually, the capabilities of text and images, thus resulting in the discovery of new ways of communication. He predicts that the impact of the combinations of text and image as grounded in the visual effects of surfaces or image-like presentations of script (via typography or layout) on our everyday life will grow steadily. As an example for this, Schmitz cites the visual composition of the packaging of current products whose presentation is no longer intended for transmitting information but for the intensification of emotional attention. This is also similar for texts in magazines or on the world wide web, so that our ways of reading texts are transformed gradually into our habit of watching images (zapping, scanning, etc.). This swift change challenges a culture which is still grounded on a higher esteem for texts, especially in the humanities with their elaborated strategies for processing and interpreting texts. Further, Schmitz introduces briefly several other studies which explicate the said phenomenon but in his opinion none of them, despite a long art-historical tradition, offers a meaningful framework for a theory of the image. In the second part of his article Schmitz attempts to describe text-image combinations. A starting point for him is the common grounding of text and image in the human imagination, which makes referencing possible. Thus, a symbiotic and productive tension between the two elements can emerge although this would still be characterized by distance and difference, for text and image are in the end different forms. Last, Elisabeth Cölfen introduces a prototype for a new learning environment for etymology and historical semantics, which, according to her, can present this field of knowledge much better than traditional media such as dictionaries (see at <http://www.linse.uni-essen.de/kuntermund_loewenmaul/etymologie_html/etymologie.htm>). Cölfen's main thesis is based on Wolfgang Coy's argumentation, namely that the internet will cause the end of printed media. According to Coy and endorsed by Cölfen, the event of the "iconic turn" and the departure from the Gutenberg galaxy as early as 1936 with Alan Turing's work lay the foundation for the development of the personal computer. Thus, in Cölfen's view, all new developments since the event of the personal computer up to downloadable music over the internet lead to the demise of traditional print media. In sum, the papers of the volume offer some interesting details and insights into the development of our current media system(s). Thus, the volume is an example of what the book by Bock could have delivered, namely detailed analyses on the history of media. At the same time, while some of the papers are extremely specialized, they illustrate the best of interdisciplinary scholarship ity.

Johannes Bittner's *Digitalität, Sprache, Kommunikation. Eine Untersuchung zur Medialität von digitalen Kommunikationsformen und Textsorten und deren varietätenlinguistische Modellierung* is the book form of the author's doctoral dissertation (selected material from the book is available online at <<http://www.digitalitaet.de/>>). The author's objective is ambitious: First, he delivers a fundamental critique of current German linguistics, that, for Bittner, is too much based in outdated dogmas. Second, Bittner attempts nothing less than to suggest an alternative to the outdated dichotomic model of the configurations of media and communication, which for Bitner differentiates, simply, between spoken and written language. Bittner's point of reference is the transformation of media with the early 1990s, and more concretely, digitality, which for him represents the one definite feature of this media transformation. As a new form of "fabrication,"

the processing and use of digitality is the real innovation and substitutes in many areas older technologies. As an example Bittner discusses photography and scientific writing, both of which have changed in significant ways within the last twenty years. Hence the declared goal of his work is to examine, from a perspective of linguistics, in what ways "digital media influence our language and our ways of communication" (21). After a brief outline of his interests in scholarship, Bittner presents a description of current research into digitality and new media in German-language scholarship. His conclusion is that with qualifying new media as a hybrid of word and image, linguistics has once again shown its hidden "written-language bias," evidently something that reached its limits. Bittner's substantial sections of empirical research are to elaborate the special conditions of new media which he illustrates with analyses of the functions of personal websites, e-mail, and chat. Bittner rejects perceptions of e-mail as an alternative letter-based communication or of chat as a digital counterpart to conversation. Instead, he suggests that these forms of communication are far more complex as well as structured differently. In consequence, Bittner questions whether or not post-Saussurean linguistics have neglected and marginalized these differences in form and content and proposes that, in fact, there is no full-fledged theory of writing extant. Taking the theory of Roy Harris as a counterpart for his own thinking, he states that "there are plenty of media-based differences between talking and writing, which make it necessary, to differentiate between them accurately" (280). The introduction of the computer altered the concepts and uses of script & writing once more radically. For example, new media requires new technical skills for its use and the technically-based possibilities of changing digital text lead to the loss of the object character of digital text. He exemplifies this argument via data storage in a database: "The saving and structuring of information is no longer oriented on human perception but on the internal logic of the database" (285). His conclusion of this part of his discussion is that there is a fundamental difference between analogous and digital script and that with digital media a new type of signs was introduced into human communication. In turn, this led to the development of a new "space" of communication whose far-reaching consequences cannot be foreseen at this point of time. What Bittner derives from this thought is that to analyze the said consequences a new epistemological understanding of language would be necessary and that this would/should be an objective of linguistics and an attempt to construct such a model constitutes the last part of his book. Here, he introduces his own new theoretical framework for analyzing contemporary German varieties of every-day language in their aspects of media awareness, which he, in addition, relates to linguistic and communicative varieties as well as to non-linguistic factors. Bittner concludes his book by outlining possible developments of digital media.

Carsten Winter, Tanja Thomas, and Andreas Hepp's volume *Medienidentitäten. Identität und Kontext von Globalisierung und Medienkultur* is a collection of papers about the current and strong interest in scholarship in matters of "identity." The editors of the volume do not see a danger of the issue of identity becoming over-used; instead, they remind us how important processes of individual self-assertion are for the question of one's own identity. The editors see three main fields worthy of scholarly discussion: The reflexive, the fragmenting, and the differentiating characters of cultural identity. After their delineation of the principal objectives of the volume, the editors ask: Which importance have the media in the process of constituting cultural identity? Their discussion includes the thought of Stuart Hall, David Morley, Kevin Robins, etc., who suggested that the concept and processes of identity relate to the boundaries of national states. They also mention to consider that a broad distribution of matters in media alone does not result necessarily in a homogenizing effect; rather, reception and audience studies in cultural studies show the socio-cultural strategy of appropriation. However, especially this makes it possible to ponder on the concept of the "local." Following Morley, our awareness of places&spaces is relativized by electronic media steadily and that especially for many young people media-conveyed styles of "youthness" become more important than the place&space of living. According to Philip Schlesinger, it is a relevant question which "importance of different forms of communication have in the process of articulating cultural identity" (15). Further, with Ien Ang, the editors also see cultural identity as fragmented into different aspects of identities and propose that, consequently, it would be important to examine the roles of singular media products, media discourses, and of

experiences of/in reception. To emphasize the conflicting characters of these processes of articulating identity, the editors urge not to forget that these resources of identity are supplied increasingly by commercial corporations of media, for whom establishing new brands and products via messages of identity has become a commonplace activity. The editors propose that one interesting conclusion from the papers of the volume would be the proposition that the articulation of identity occurs increasingly by means of media-offered resources. Thus, their final thesis is that media and identity can no longer be separated from another. Current identities are in this understanding always identities of media, brought forth by an overly media-occupied everyday life. At the same time, the relationship between media and identity is highly complex and contradictory.

The volume is presented in four parts, the first of which begins with a discussion of theoretical concepts. Friedrich Krotz proposes in his article to use the method of symbolic interactionism to clarify the interrelation between media and identity. According to this, identity is understood "dynamically as a constant balance of the individual between self-representation and attribution in different situations of communication ... a balance that makes communication possible at all" (28). In Krotz's understanding, identity is not something substantial, but a fragile, communicatively constructed lifelong process. Media can either influence this structurally "in this case not so much by their content, but more by changing the way and the habitually inscribed worldviews of communication" (42) or by offering thematic resources, which "offer and keep ready content as attributes for constituting identity" or by "mediating relations to media characters and orientation for conduct" (41). Carsten Winter discusses in his paper some of the important theoretical positions of such scholars as Giddens, Hall, Derrida, and Ang on postmodernism, globalization, and their consequences on the understanding of identity. He then proposes his own concept of media culture for empirical research on the complex communicative articulation of media identities. He argues that his model enables a differentiated analysis of media-articulated communicative techniques and a "specific understanding of identity in the context of globalized media cultures" (49). Winter understands identity as a media-articulated cultural construct of communicative processes on three levels: person, group, and the "global configuration of identity" (49). Unfortunately, while his model is intriguing, he does not provide examples of the application of the model. Kurt Imhof describes in his more or less political science and sociology oriented article the correlation between the political public and the nation-state-driven validities of identity in the European modernity. To me, his paper is somewhat out of context here, since he discusses the political consequences of a deficitary political and media public, i.e., with regard to the deficits and problems of democracy in the European Union. Andreas Hepp expounds the problems of the theoretical construct of "collective identity." Hepp suggests that the current understanding of the notion of collective identity is too simplistic: Collective attributions are also relevant instances for the self and external definition of identity and Hepp understands identity as a specific articulation related to one person and this person's local sphere alone. Thus, identity as media identity results for Hepp not in homogenous collective identities but rather in different "imagined communities" as introduced by Benedict Anderson. It is on this background that Hepp analyzes media identity and comes to the conclusion that an individual's identification with certain identity resources results in the formation of (imagined) communities where the individual feels related to media-transmitted discourses and representations. Therefore, landscapes of thought such as nations in the European Union are still central focal points for articulating identity. But with a globalized system of media communication also different deterritorialized communities have been added, distinguishable by ethnic, commercial, or political criteria and these (de)territorialized communities are intertwined in high complexity.

The second part of the book covers investigations of identity constructs in cultural products. Matthias Marschik and Johann Dorer present in their article several examples for the discussion of identity formation with regard to contemporary Austrian media, with particular attention to identity culture as perceived in media (*Identitätsangebote*). Katharina Walgenbach discusses a *Kolonie und Heimat*, a magazine of history -- in particular on German colonization in Africa -- published between 1907 and 1911. She examines the closely intertwined constructions of white identity,

gender, and race in the articles of this at the time prominent magazine. Her conclusions are that the intended readership of the magazine was a female audience, with the ideological objective to impart the concept of a colonizing "white collective." At the same time, the magazine sought to conserve the class-specific distinctions between these "whites." As a result, Walgenbach proposes a change of perspective when analyzing identity: To understand identity formation, it is not sufficient to examine constructions of the "Other"; rather, it is needed to scrutinize also the creation of dominant and hegemonic self-images and identities. Gabriela B. Christmann focuses on the impact of the media on urban identities. Since in her opinion this perspective is underrepresented in scholarship, she delivers first a short overview on the current state of research. Her theoretical point of departure is the constructivist sociology of knowledge developed by Peter L. Berg and Thomas Luckmann. According to Berg and Luckmann urban identity can be understood as the product of historical communicative processes of construction and reconstruction. Thus, Christmann asks how urban identity is constructed and what factors of identity formation are at work in contemporary Dresden (a city in the former East Germany). Her analysis is based on videos made about the city's baroque buildings and on interviews about the viewers' perceptions of the videos. Christmann concludes that the videos, along with other media, play a role in establishing a visual collective memory of mostly positive identity formation. Olaf Sanders dedicates himself in his paper to the proposition that films can question the idea of identity itself and he employs the example of films by Catherine Breillat, Wong Kar-Wei, and Takeshi Kitano to study the question of identity and film. Last, Tanja Thomas presents in her paper aspects on the construction of a shared German national identity (*Nationalgefühl*) in 1999 -- after the fall of the Berlin Wall -- in the contexts of anthropological and cultural points of view. Thomas's analysis concerns public and media discourse in 1999 as seen in German Talk shows, when the then new federal government of the former two Germanies attempted to reform German civil rights.

The central question of the third part of the book is how certain groups of people incorporate media-based representations of identity (*Identitätsangebote*) into their everyday articulation of identity. Udo Göttlich discusses the lack of scholarship with regard to media use by immigrant ethnic minority groups. He analyzes current research strategies and concludes, critically, that the current media situation and cultural paradigms are not sufficiently dealt with in current German-language scholarship. For example, Göttlich queries why the concept of "integration" is understood as subordination to mainstream society. Gabriele Birken-Silverman evaluates anthropologically the everyday communication of adolescents on the scene of hip-hop in the West German city of Mannheim. As an example, she analyzes the media-inspired construction of nicknames and shows how music, films, and advertisement can offer sets of factors for patterns and attribution of identification. Youth, thus Birken-Silverman's conclusion, develops a social-group-adequate style of communication, which can help to establish community and identity. Dorothee Meer discusses in her paper the importance talkshows have in everyday discourses on normality and shows processes of self-assertion and self-positioning by the recipients. In her paper on popular culture, Maya Götz sees great interpretational opportunities in daily soaps, despite their emotion-driven content. Their audience is, especially, youth, because they can find their own experiences symbolized in the television images or because their own ideals and perspectives of their self-images are confirmed. Thus, daily soaps as a genre fit surprisingly well into an experience-seeking society of individuals, because it allows for numerous strategies of taking over material from them and still delivers a feeling of community orientation. Christiane Funken analyzes chat communication and online gaming in MUDs and ego-shooters. Her conclusion is, that these simulated environments offer the possibilities for their users to produce authentic and credible images of themselves by offering relatively strong structures and so help to secure experiences of authenticity. Lutz Ellrich takes the postmodern uncertainty about identity for granted and asks how the postmodern elite (entrepreneurs, high-end technicians, hackers, etc.) copes with this. His thesis is that a concrete sensual experience with computers and the thus induced feeling of unity between body and machine offers the said postmodern elite a foundation for the relativization or deconstruction of old norms and values. Thus, they are able to question previous modes of

thinking and behavior as they are deeply convinced that computer and new media technology will soon create a new obligatory order. As "proof" of this rather out-of-the-ordinary suggestion Ellrich cites the especially emphatic description of computers by the target group and their strict distinction between a working and a non-working computer: The computer evokes in them the assumption of a techno-symbolic totalitarianism. The only threat to this "digital elite" lies paradoxically in the same computer technology as it also undermines the anonymity it pretends to establish.

The last part of the book concentrates on processes of identity formation to show risks and creative possibilities of media identities. Lothar Mikos's thesis is that on the "market of identity" individuals always have to struggle for attention. A public performance on television thus can be helpful in generating self-images, but only for the price of higher risks for the own identity, since the dynamics between self-image and outside perceptions are hardly possible to influence. Mikos exemplifies his proposition by evaluating three seasons of the television series *Big Brother*. Horst Niesyto and Peter Holzwarth present selected results of their international research project on video culture. In the project, German, British, Czech, Hungarian, and US-American youth is supported to produce their own videos followed by mutual viewing of the videos. Not focused singularly on "identity," this research project resulted in some findings on several aspects of identity construction among youths. The authors are especially interested in commonly used symbols for they can also result in estrangement, as reported, when a group in Los Angeles was shown a German rap video with English-sung hip-hop. Christian Wenger's article is based on the assumption that processes of identity-related self-formation become more and more a personal matter. One specific aspect of mass-media-induced identity formation are fan cultures, understood as post-traditional, voluntary communities, which ground their strength in identity construction based on the voluntary emotional self-binding of their members. Wenger illustrates his notion on several aspects of fandom such as community consciousness, distinction, rejection, or strategies of self-assertion. His conclusion is that fan cultures on the one hand offer the potential for establishing a reliable and lasting social home but that, on the other hand, it will always stay very instable, since "the belief onto their existence is their only construction material and the claim to be important is the only source of their authority" (359). Yet, for the greatest part of fans this non-committal situation and openness for different ways of intensity is also the reason for the attraction of fan cultures. Jeffrey Wimmers discusses the close relationship between the anti-globalization movement and mass media. For the goal of this new movement is not --- as was the case with the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s -- to create an anti-publicity, but to influence their presentation within mainstream media and to offer alternative perspectives to the public opinion. By achieving this objective, the collective identity of the movement is created. In the last paper of the volume, Sebastian Haunss examines collective self-assertion by means of posters. His examples are one poster of the German anti-nuclear-energy movement and another poster about an anti-imperialist action group which he analyzes with regard to their pictorial language in the use of motives and symbols. He sees the multiple functions of these posters as expressions of critical responses to media-based identity representations (*Identitätsangebote*). Further, Haunss suggests that the public purpose of information of the posters is parallel to the character of internal communication within these groups as such posters often require contextual knowledge in order to understand them. Thus, they serve as an element of identification and as a factor to stabilize collective identities. In sum, I believe that volume represents interdisciplinary scholarship where aspects of identity are explored with various frameworks and methodologies based in several disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. At times with more successful relevance and insight than in others, although the opinions of individual contributors differ substantially on the question of "collective identity," they more or less confirm the editors' thesis on the importance of media in identity formation.

Udo Göttlich, Clemens Albrecht, and Winfried Gebhardt's *Populäre Kultur als repräsentative Kultur. Die Herausforderung der Cultural Studies* is a collection of papers from a conference held at Mühlheim in 2001. The objective of the conference was to foster discussion between scholars working in the sociology of culture and *Kulturwissenschaften*/cultural studies. The editors write in

their introduction that they can see certain common grounds, but also certain differences. In consequence, they pledge to avoid disciplinary boundaries and claims of hegemonic argumentation and propose to explore commonalities and parallels in theory and research. A great commonality between the disciplines is seen in their basic features, namely in their common interest in contextualization, theory-based empirical research, self-reflection, and interdisciplinarity. One of the principal questions in the minds of the editors is about the success of cultural studies in scholarship world wide would. With regard to the thought of Max Weber and his impact on German *Kulturwissenschaften* the editors query whether "Max Weber's postulate of an unbiased scholarship seems strictly contradictory to the interventionism of cultural studies ... aiming at political change and participation" (9-10). They propose that this suggestion would not be significant if it is understood as the subjective interest-based grounding of the individual researcher's perspective but if it means a claim of moral superiority or political "wisdom," the difference between Weber and cultural studies becomes unbridgeable indeed. At the same time, the editors propose that the long-lasting antagonism between scholarship of popular culture (as represented in cultural studies) and elitist and bourgeois high culture (as represented in German *Kulturwissenschaften* and in the field of the sociology of culture) has become unproductive. It is thus that their goal with this book is to bridge these antagonisms "by taking the classical traditions of the sociology of culture ... to transfer into the context of research in cultural studies" (10). Following classic sociology of culture thinking, culture is considered as representative "if it makes available values, meanings, and ideas which take effect by a *de facto* acknowledgement. Representative culture includes the sum of those beliefs, understandings, world views, ideas, and ideologies which influence social action, because they are shared actively or respected passively" (10). Thus, the question for both disciplines would be whether the manifold varieties of popular culture are going to replace bourgeois high culture?

In the first part of the book two authors concentrate -- despite the proclaimed objective of harmony in the introduction -- on emphasizing the differences between the sociology of culture and cultural studies. Clemens Albrecht begins with a plea for the sociology of culture with a short overview of the revitalized discipline's research on the bourgeoisie, leading to a description of the genesis of the hegemonic concept of "representative culture." He then examines how innovative cultural studies are compared to this and comes to the conclusion that most of what is done in cultural studies has already been done in the field of sociology of culture. He employs the example of the analysis of culture: "The sociology of culture is and already was, what cultural studies claim as their first innovation: analyzing structures of power" (25). It is the potential of "democratization" and the attention to aspects of politics that explains for Albrecht the strength of cultural studies: In the same way the humanities backed historically the self-proclaimed significance of bourgeoisie culture, nowadays cultural studies claim representative significance for popular culture. Thus, cultural studies as the political project of the "politics of entertainment," but in his opinion this does not make cultural studies a "scientific" discipline in the context of Weber. Albrecht comes to the conclusion that the sociology of culture, on the contrary, is able to explain theoretically the emergence of new forms of representative culture and their intellectual ways of generalization. Udo Göttlich reacts to Albrecht's theses and presents in his paper a short description of the theoretical variations within cultural studies. In his opinion the common thread of the theoretical questions is their shared interest in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic strategies and processes. Thus, by analyzing popular culture the objective of research would be how the media industry produces the "politics of entertainment" and how the recipients/audience make affirmative or opposing uses out of the product in question. Further, Göttlich discusses objects and themes of scholarship such as media change and the research into cultural processes of different forms and genres of popular culture. He concludes that German scholarship in the sociology of culture is lacking insight in these fields because it is trapped in a bourgeois national culture.

The second part of the book offers a methodical and theoretical interdisciplinary approach on the concepts of "culture." Hans-Otto Hügel discusses several concepts of popular culture, but concludes that as of yet no theoretically comprehensive approach in scholarship exists to deal with

the question adequately. Kaspar Maase describes in a historical perspective the relation of "mass culture" to bourgeois "high culture," followed by an interpretation of post-bourgeois popular culture as the representative culture of the democracy of the masses. The objective of Siegfried J. Schmidt's contribution is to present a draft concept of culture that is oriented "operationally and not in stratification, selective or even additive (123). Schmidt depicts culture from a (radical) constructivist point of view as only a product of discourse, "as a socially-relevant program of distinction management in the semantic space of the reality model of a society (3). Schmidt argues that the issue of cultural studies should not be culture itself but, rather, the problems of its observation. Rainer Diaz-Bone debates similarities and differences between discourse theory and cultural studies by means of two examples of popular music, techno and heavy metal. The third part of the book offers analyses and assessments of developments within popular culture. In his paper, Werner Köster examines different discourses with regard to transformations of the media since the beginning of the twentieth century via the theoretical concept of "mentalities of media." He describes these as "collective schemes of order and evaluation with a great social impact, they lead the experiences of media-based relations and their change, interpret the societal relevance of media, and motivate cultural, pedagogical, and political behavior. These ways of argumentation take theories and simplify them (164). As a result, five basic figures of argumentation emerge for the interpretation of media: media as means of education, enlightenment, democratization, political propaganda, and as fulfillment of postmodern arbitrariness. Peter J. Bräunlein shows the importance of modern media as means of religious identity construction. He exemplifies his notion via two adaptations of an Indian religious text and emphasizes in conclusion the challenge of media-transported religion. Gabriele Klein analyzes in her article global pop culture and shows practical ways of incorporating globalized images. For Klein, pop culture as it was globalized early is the predecessor of cultural production and practice in postmodern societies. On the one hand, she employs central theses of cultural studies and, on the other hand, the theory of performance based on Bourdieu's work. Klein concludes that "the practice of pop culture cannot so much be described as local representation of a global cultural industry, but more as a practice of cultural performance" (208). In his essay on the aesthetic challenges of modernity, Ian Chambers discusses in a historical perspective (beginning with the European colonization of America and referring to the early sources of jazz) the origins and forms of global urban culture and sees within the hybrid, postcolonial city the recurrent questioning of modernity. Douglas Kellner -- one of the prominent US-American scholars of cultural studies -- introduces the political project of cultural studies by evaluating the strategies of market take-overs by McDonald's. Kellner understands the phenomenon McDonald's primarily as a process of societal rationalization. But McDonald's is also more than just a rational and profit-maximizing way of producing and consuming processed food. Through the marketing strategies of the company, a visit to McDonald's reveals a multitude of meanings: For consumers in the United States it is the symbol for affirming their own culture and for people in non-Western countries it has thus become understood as the possibility of participating in (the myth of) Western modernity. Kellner's critical article ends -- for me oddly -- with a demand for further scholarly and multi-perspective analyses of McDonald's, but so beyond biased criticism. Ronald Hitzler works on the highly debated and controversial concept of "fun culture" and its relation to hedonism. He begins by analyzing the ancient Greek understanding of hedonism, follows its traces through the 1960s, and examines finally hedonism in its most recent phenotypes in the "fun culture" of the 1990s. He sees a danger in this latest development, but not necessarily in hedonism itself, but in the accompanying egoism and its effects on weakening common societal norms of coexistence and mutual respect. Hitzler sees evidence for this spread of self-centric behavior poll results he cites. Franz Liebl portrays in his article a reversed form of opposing allocation: He introduces cultural studies as an instrument of marketing for individualized modes of consumption on saturated markets. Further, he describes the radicalization of a do-it-yourself-approach towards music, style, or general consumption into completely new lifestyles by presenting case studies and he concludes that cultural studies also will have to use such types of scholarship if it wants to remain a relevant discipline of scholarship. Winfried Gebhardt presents a critique in this last paper of the book of the still-existing opposition between classical (philological)

scholarship in the humanities and cultural studies. He proposes that the sociology of culture can help in bridging their mutual blind spots, since it "assumes a constant interrelation between high culture and popular culture" (290). In fact, for Gebhardt there are many commonalities between high and popular culture and both have become subject to transformational processes, which ultimately lead to a mingling of these previously separated areas of culture. As reasons for these transformations he sees the social processes of "scenification" and "eventization." Before explaining this in detail, however, he examines the history of bourgeoisie, concluding that the free assembly of individuals is the specialty of bourgeois culture. They became the places of bourgeois self-consciousness, in politics, in economy, and in the area culture especially via the form of the festivals and events of classical music. Yet, in the second half of the twentieth century this dominance diminishes by the arrival and emergence of popular culture. Gebhardt concludes that as entertainment becomes the central point of cultural experiences for audiences, the boundaries between different areas of culture become permeable and interchangeable.

These five books I reviewed here have in common the theme of the effects and results of current changes in the media systems (mostly) with regard to Germany and in the context of the impact of modernity. Three of the volumes focus directly on media (Bock; Schmitz, Wenzel; Bittner), one book is somewhere in-between (Winter, Thomas, Hepp), and one is with focus on culture and its relationship with media (Göttlich, Albrecht, Gebhardt). Bock's book is interesting in that his intention is to question the taken-for-granted trust in pictures, which is so common in our societies, by contrasting the history of photography with the history of pictures-as-symbols. Unfortunately, the book is not exactly complete and leaves the reader wanting more. As already mentioned, the anthology by Schmitz and Wenzel is in many ways the opposite. Detailed, inspired, interdisciplinary, and with a fresh attitude: The authors achieve an interesting historical contextualization of current transformations in media and offer some interesting insights, especially the articles by Ott, Fröhlich, or Schmitz. Whereas the article by Coy falls a little bit short of to capture my interest. In particular, his argumentation about the "deadly embrace" of the internet is too short, and thus lacks detailed argumentation and especially in the manner of historical contextualization the other authors in the volume offer. Bittner also embraces the ongoing transformations of media as an opportunity to establish new methods and concepts in scholarship. It is a book with a positive attitude towards this challenge. While the evident self-confidence of the author is somewhat entertaining, in the end I wonder whether he did not try to incorporate too much into this one book. The anthology by Winter, Thomas, and Hepp is also a genuinely interdisciplinary work. In the anthology of Göttlich, Albrecht, and Gebhardt interdisciplinary is not achieved easily. Where in the Winter, Thomas, and Hepp volume interdisciplinary approaches are used productively, some of the papers in the Göttlich, Albrecht, and Gebhardt volume discuss such with overdue seriousness as to whether the one or the other discipline is more suited for a given task. To me, this we-can-do-it-better attitude is a turn-off. Perhaps this form of parochial single-mindedness is typical in German-language scholarship, where language is purposefully convoluted? The volume has its share also of highly theoretical texts in the said convoluted language and expression -- in German this is called *Wissenschaftssprache* (scientific language)... However, overall the papers in the volumes offer a broad scope of recent trends in German media studies. Interesting to me is also that the more established scholars resort to cultural pessimism. While this is nothing new in German humanities, this "principle" becomes evident just once again. A very generalized conclusion on these five books (perhaps unjustified but here it is), may be that in this sample the most intriguing proposals for understanding current media systems are offered by scholars who constrain themselves to one, clear issue, and who do not attempt to explain theoretically "everything." What is also striking is that despite the long and established traditions in German media studies and the truly in-depth productions of scholarship in most instances theoretical thought is based on English-language scholarship. At the same time, this is surely based on the recognition that media, in principle, is in current times an area most influenced from the US whether it is technology, ways of using media, ways of presenting media, or scholarship.

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